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ABSTRACT

The now defunct School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 provided start-up funding for states to establish comprehensive career development systems. Survey results of 21 intermediary organizations that used funding from the act to provide learning experiences for youth showed that the loss of federal funding affected activities in various ways, including program mix, composition of local partnerships, scale of activities, and the population served. Characteristics of organizations most successful after the funding cut-off include: (1) developed multiple funding streams, (2) are flexible and adaptable; and (3) existed prior to the federal School-to-Work legislation. Uncertain funding circumstances have caused organizations to respond with a range of strategies that serve local needs and can be sustained. These three general response models predominate: (1) coordinate a comprehensive system; (2) design and broker quality services; and (3) narrow focus to a special niche. (Eleven tables and a reading list are included. Appended is a one-page description of the Intermediary Network.) (AJ)

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School-to-Work Intermediary Project
Issue Brief
June 2002

After the Sunset: Sustaining School-to-Work Intermediary Activity

Terry Grobe

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JUNE 2002

SCHOOL-TO-WORK INTERMEDIARY PROJECT

ISSUE BRIEF

AFTER THE SUNSET: SUSTAINING SCHOOL-TO-WORK INTERMEDIARY ACTIVITY

By Terry Grobe

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 provided funds to states to establish comprehensive career development systems. Through local partnerships and, in many places, local intermediary organizations, communities began to redesign learning experiences for youth in ways that could help students advance academically and in careers. This brief provides a snapshot of how the loss of federal funds has affected intermediary organizations and characterizes some strategies that Intermediary Network members are using to respond to the changed fiscal and policy context.

In 1998, Jobs for the Future and New Ways to Work received federal support to launch the School-to-Work Intermediary Project. This effort raised the profile and strengthened the work of local organizations that connect schools, workplaces, and community resources to improve career pathways for young people. Almost all of these entrepreneurial organizations—a network of 50 intermediaries by late 2001—initially used federal School-to-Work funding to build or expand their local operations.

From the outset, the members of this national network understood that federal School-to-Work funding was temporary. They realized that intermediary organizations would quickly need to prove their "value added" and build local support if they were to survive and grow beyond federal start-up funding.

As federal School-to-Work grants have ended or come to their final year, most Network members—and other organizations across the country that play convening, brokering, quality assurance, and policy-promoting roles for school-to-career efforts—have taken steps to plan strategically for the future. They are deciding where to concentrate their work, build capacity, form alliances, and position their efforts in relation to varied revenue streams. Some have been more successful than others; some have been more fortunate than others.

In late 2001, Jobs for the Future surveyed Intermediary Network members to determine how their organizations were faring at the twilight of the federal investment. The survey explored whether and how the sunset of the national legislation affected the operations of the intermediary organizations. It collected information on how the organizations were adapting to sustain their roles in their communities. The survey explored funding opportunities and strategies that were helping intermediaries continue their work. Jobs for the Future obtained additional information through phone interviews with a subset of survey respondents.

Based on the survey and follow-up interviews, Jobs for the Future prepared this Issue Brief summarizing and analyzing the strategies and progress of the most active organizations in the Intermediary Network. Twenty-one Network members responded to the survey.

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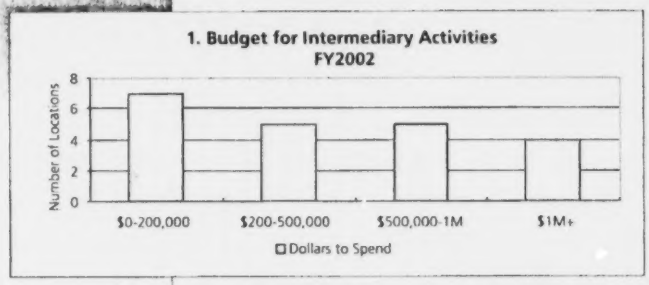

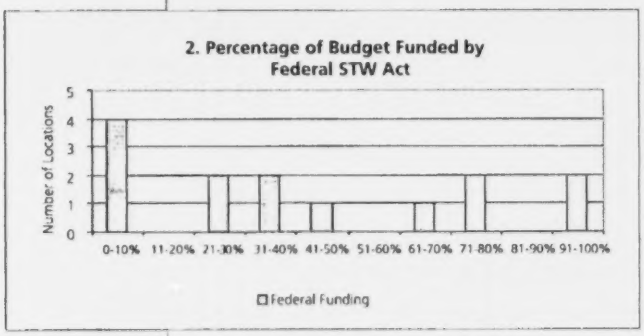

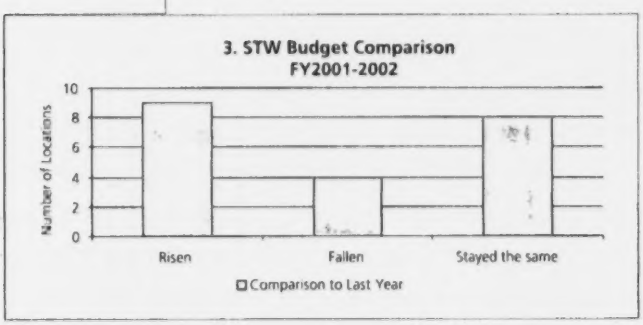

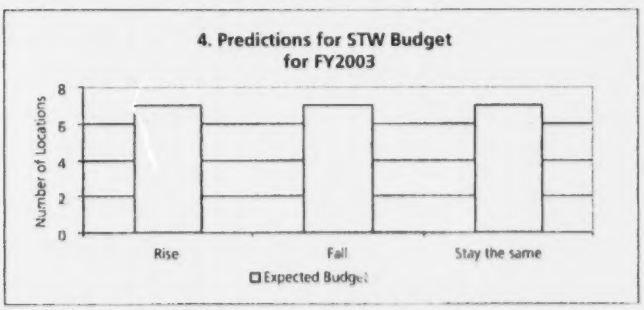

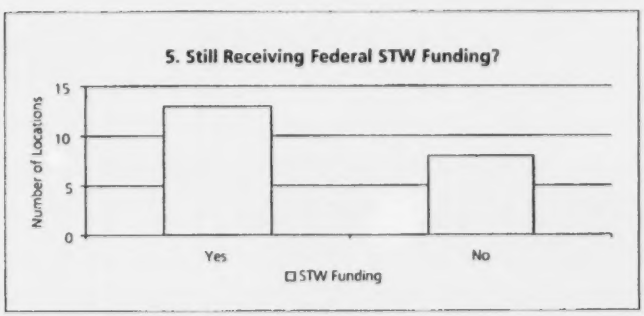

The evidence presented here represents a status report from a select group, one that has been relatively successful in making the transition beyond federal School-to-Work. Struggling intermediary organizations were less likely to respond to the survey. We know that some organizations that joined the Network in the past three years have become inactive; some have shifted their focus away from linking schools and employers and toward other youth-serving initiatives; some have had significant changes in leadership and staffing; and a few have disappeared.

A Statistical Summary: Network Members and the Sunset of Federal School-to-Work Funding and

In general, organizations that developed multiple funding streams early on appear to be more flexible and better able to adapt to changing conditions. Similarly, organizations that existed prior to the federal School-to-Work legislation have frequently been able to respond to new opportunities.

The survey paints a picture of 21 organizations that are fiscally healthy and adapting effectively. The intermediaries that responded to the survey include large and small organizations (Charts 1 and 2). Over 40 percent increased their budgets for school-to-career activities in 2002, while only 20 percent reported a decrease in overall funding (Chart 3).

For FY2003, over half of the intermediaries surveyed expect their budgets to rise or stay the same (Chart 4). Significantly, 13 of the 21 intermediaries surveyed still receive some School-to-Work funding, although that will end for the most part either this year or in 2003 (Charts 5, 6, and 7). These organizations are in a transition period.

The loss of federal funding has altered the work of most organizations, although seven Network sites note no change in the level or kind of activities from the previous year (Chart 8). The loss of federal funding has affected activities in various ways, including

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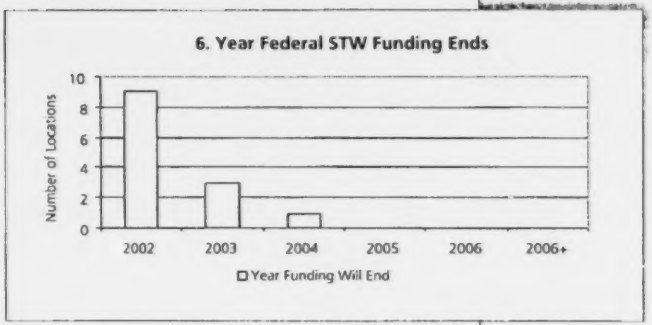
the program mix, the composition of local partnerships, the scale of activities, and the populations served (Chart 9).

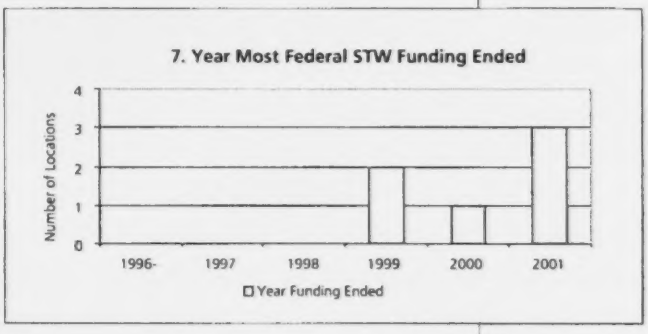
Some Intermediary Network members reported changes in operations. Catalyst Connection/Pittsburgh Technology Council, for example, shifted some staff from full-time to part-time status. In Pittsfield, Massachusetts, changes in operation have been a mixed blessing. On the one hand, state funding finally allowed the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board (an employment and training organization) to place career development staff in the schools. On the other hand, decreased funding means that staff can work on school-to-career activities only five to ten hours a week.

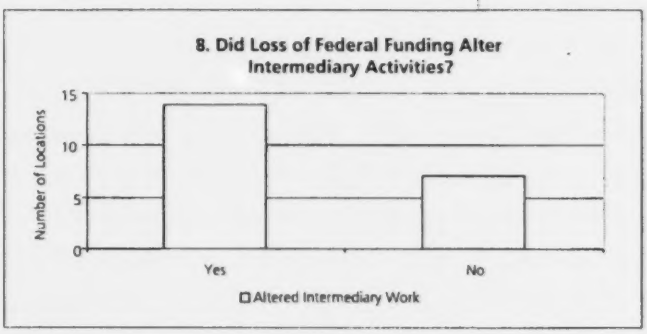
A number of intermediaries reported changes in the populations they serve or the level of services they provide. Several now serve a narrower youth population: examples include WIA-eligible youth (Middle Rio Grande Business and Education Collaborative) or youth with disabilities (Iowa Retail Foundation). Fox Cities Alliance for Education in Wisconsin has dropped one large event and cut back on teacher externships and work placements. In Brockton, Massachusetts, due to changes in funding mix, MY TURN has fewer staff working with the school system and devotes more staff time to out-of-school youth programs. This is also true for BE^2: The Learning Exchange in Kansas City, Missouri, which now works more with young people in the Youth Opportunity Grant area.

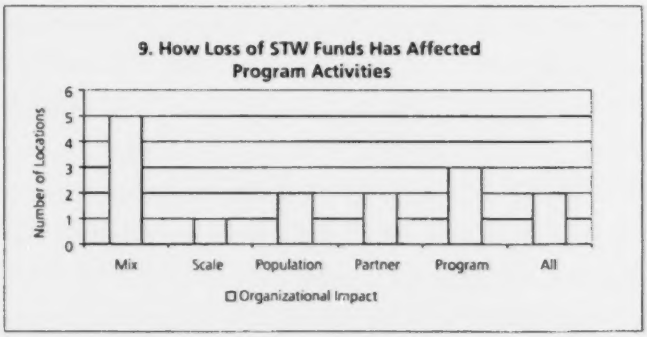
For other intermediaries, funding changes have prompted revisions in the service model. Melissa Orner reports that the Philadelphia Youth Network has experienced "a shift away from work defined by programs and services (such as job development and placement) to more categorical grant-driven work, especially grants dealing with specific youth populations."

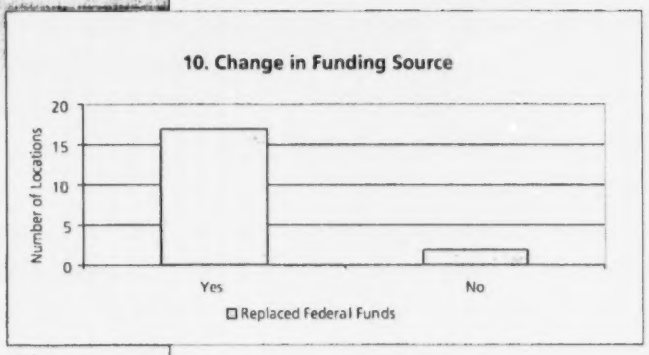
Perhaps the most common change has been in the mix of funding streams secured for intermediary activities (Charts 10 and 11). Seventeen sites report that they raised other funds to replace federal dollars. These funds have most frequently been secured from other federal sources (such as Small Learning Communities, 21st Century Learning Center, or Workforce Intermediary Act funds) and from private foundations. BE^2 is one of sever-

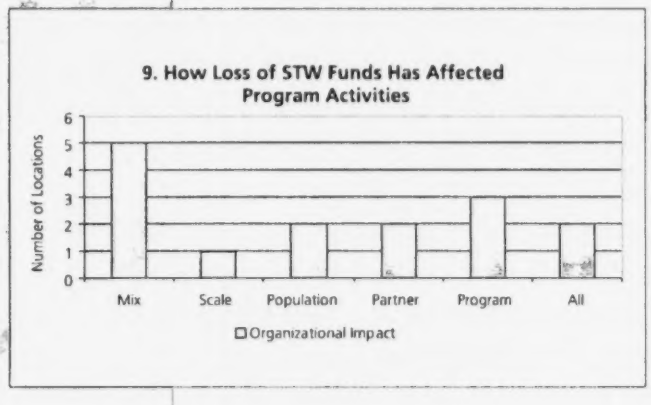












al organizations reporting a move toward earned income, with more products and services that can be disseminated or delivered through fees.

Strategies for Sustainability: How are Intermediaries Adjusting?

How have successful intermediary organizations stayed active and vibrant in uncertain times? Members of the Intermediary Network demonstrate a range of strategies that serve local needs and can be sustained. Three general models predominate among survey respondents:

- Organizations that are positioning themselves as coordinators and promoters of comprehensive, systemwide innovations;
- Organizations that provide specific, high-quality brokering or service delivery that stakeholders value; and
- Organizations that narrow their focus to areas of particular competence or to a special niche.

Creating a Comprehensive System

Several Network members seek to position themselves as the regional organization that brings employers, educators, community leaders, and other stakeholders to the table for joint activities. These organizations undertake the convening function not just for the sake of better programming but in order to lead community-wide efforts that build more comprehensive systems linking schools and outside resources for the benefit of young people.

The Workplace Learning Connection is a regional intermediary serving 33 Iowa school districts. Perhaps its major accomplishment is its success in building ongoing financial support into the budgets of its partners. Says Director Mary Lou Erlacher, "The goal is: if it's good for kids and good for businesses, it ought to be a line item."

The Workplace Learning Connection has negotiated a ten-cents-per-pupil fee with six school districts to pay for some of the organization's ongoing brokering functions and to bring government into partnerships. Through these agreements, county boards of supervisors support school-to-career efforts based on a "closing the skills gap" rationale.

The Workplace Learning Connection provides several core services to schools, among them job shadows, internships, tours, and speakers. Schools generate a needs-based plan in the spring, involving key administrative, guidance, and teaching staff. The intermediary then brokers or provides the services during the next school year.

The Workplace Learning Connection has put a great deal of effort into building a system of support and ownership for its school-to-career efforts. It is seeking to get schools to sign on as "Business-Friendly": 95 percent of participating schools have signed agreements that involve mutual expectations and commitments. The organization is also signing up employers as "School-Friendly": employers that agree to provide multi-year financial support for brokering activities.

In the future, the Workplace Learning

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Connection would like to create three satellite offices to broker services, with the intermediary providing centralized oversight and support. The organization recently secured $20,000 to open the first of these satellite offices in Iowa City.

Another regional intermediary with a broad strategy is New Orleans-based **MetroVision School-to-Career Partnership,** which covers seven parishes with seven school districts. MetroVision received federal School-to-Work funding in 1997, through a state block grant. Its advisory board has defined its mission as aligning school-to-career efforts with the region's economic development priorities.

According to Director Susan Burge, MetroVision began by pulling together lead CEOs from major industry clusters, starting with financial services. Staff members polled employers on the specific skills and knowledge needed within their industries, looking at both broad and industry specific skills. Businesses were then asked what kind of commitments they would make to get the outcomes they wanted.

MetroVision next talked to school personnel, asking the same questions about needs and commitments. From these initial conversations, industry consortia emerged in many sectors, such as travel and tourism, law and justice, information technology, and the construction trades. MetroVision collaborated with national and local associations to develop and launch career academies in these industries.

The consortia support a range of activities for the career academies, including teacher and student internships, job shadows, and career speakers. At the outset, School-to-Work funds supported the salaries of consortium coordinators. Now, four of the consortia fund their coordinators through donations from participating businesses.

MetroVision is attempting to expand the scale of some of this successful work. To this end, it has fashioned an initiative called "Students: Priority #1." Using a community-mobilization model, staff polled over 1,600 people throughout MetroVision's seven-parish area. They asked individuals in schools, businesses, community settings, and families what students needed to know and be able to do to succeed in the twenty-first-century economy.

MetroVision developed a competitive process for schools that wanted to be included in the effort. The organization offered schools a variety of incentives to participate, such as planning funds and teacher stipends. Nine schools now participate by engaging in an intensive strategic planning process with related professional development. The goal is to develop and implement school-wide school-to-career systems. Through this initiative, MetroVision has supported change efforts in a number of districts. The groundwork enabled it to win a $2.5 million Small Learning Communities Grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

MetroVision considers evaluation to be a major challenge of its efforts and is concentrating on collecting data to demonstrate the school success and achievement outcomes of youth involved in school-to-career activities. A multi-year evaluation is underway, with support from a local foundation. Metrovision hopes that this data will make it easier to garner additional foundation funding.

The **Philadelphia Youth Network** has used Workforce Investment Act funding to infuse school-to-career principles and activities into a larger network of youth service providers. As the administrator of WIA funds for the city's Youth Council, PYN contracts with a wide network of service providers.

Director Melissa Orner says that the Philadelphia Youth Network supports the Youth Council's goal of aligning WIA programming with academic standards, which include school-to-career, cross-cutting competencies, and field-based learning strategies. Thus, much PYN-supported programming involves youth in paid experiences that connect learning and work-readiness, use a work-based-learning plan, and provide access to a work-based mentor.

The Philadelphia Youth Network has leveraged WIA, TANF, and Youth Opportunities Grant dollars to support year-round and summer experiences for more than 7,000 youth annually. The major strands under this YouthWorks program, all of which employ a project-based learning approach, are: Work Experience (work-based learning), Summer Youth Service Corps (a service learning approach), and Experience-Based Education (college-based programs that combine academic support, work readiness, and college awareness). PYN also provides employer connections and work readiness for the city's Youth Opportunities Grant, using a recognized school-to-career model of job developers and career specialists to ensure an effective sequence of work-based experiences for both in-school and out-of-school youth.

Designing and Brokering Quality Services

Some organizations have sustained efforts by expanding the number of partners they serve and brokering high-quality school-based and work-based learning services for young people. For example, the **Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce Education Foundation,** in operation since 1995, recently focused its efforts on a partnership with North Charleston High School, a 1,200-student school with a high at-risk population.

North Charleston High had not been involved in earlier school-to-career efforts in the city. What convinced the principal of the efficacy of this approach was a trip to Boston for an Intermediary Network intersite meeting. Since then, North Charleston has developed a "sister school" arrangement with Boston's Brighton High School, working with the Education Foundation to restructure its operations along career pathways. Thanks to the progress made by this partnership, North Charleston High has secured nearly $3 million in new state and federal grants, including a U.S. Education Department Small Learning Communities Grant and funding for a state magnet assistance program.

The Education Foundation continues to work on other education and workforce development initiatives. As a result of a collaboration with the Foundation, the Charleston school system uses general purpose funds to support a full-time school-to-career facilitator. The Foundation also sponsors an annual Business/Education Summit that brings together educators and employers to discuss current issues in education.

Federal grants, says Executive Director Stacey Denaux, have made it easier for the Education Foundation to garner local corporate and foundation grants. Together, the funding sources support an array of career development and school-to-career activities.

Linking Learning to Life, in Burlington, Vermont, has worked with partners to broker services and create a linked set of functions and staff. "From the beginning, we were funded through a federal Urban/Rural Opportunities Grant," says Director Richard Tulikangas. "It was a five-year grant, but we saw the services and the functions as needing to be permanent. So we worked first to build the functions and then to sustain them." Linking Learning to Life now has 17 revenue streams, including federal, state, and local government money, foundation grants, and other leveraged funds.

Linking Learning to Life brokers services in creative ways. In one instance, the organization worked with the Vermont Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to pilot a school-based vocational rehabilitation program. Linking Learning to Life initially paid for the coordinator, with the understanding that the intermediary and the state would split the cost 50/50 in the second year. In the third year of operation, the state picked up the cost of the coordinator. In another instance, Linking Learning to Life worked with a local Youth and Family Services agency to create a part-time staff position for youth outreach. The position was funded through a grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

Linking Learning to Life also developed a program for at-risk middle school youth transitioning to the high school, funded through

WIA and a 21st Century Learning Center Grant. Linking Learning to Life works on professional development and career development activities for teachers through funding from a Small Learning Communities Grant at the high school. Among other activities, Linking Learning to Life runs a summer internship program for educators.

Tulikangas says it is hard for school systems to keep providing support in these tough economic times. He works with the new school superintendent, pursuing creative ideas for partnership. One is an idea for opening a program to recapture out-of-district special education students and recoup the high costs associated with out-of-district placement. Linking Learning to Life is also looking for corporate sources of support.

Narrowing the Focus

Some intermediaries have focused on a particular sector to expand buy-in and support for school-to-career policies or activities. **The New York Citywide School-to-Work Alliance** is one such example. The Alliance is using a three-year grant (from unspent New York State funds from the federal School-to-Work program) to make strategic investments in several large, school-based ventures. It has used this funding to support three city high schools that have signed on to the Southern Regional Education Board's High Schools That Work Initiative.* The Alliance supports a full-time staff person to work with these schools on improving their overall operations. In addition, funding supports work on a Career Plan Portfolio project and a Career and Technical Education Reform effort.

Along with these larger investments, the Alliance contracts with various agencies and organizations that can help grow its partnership work. For example, the Alliance contracts with the Fund for the City of New York to infuse school-to-career principles and activities into after-school programs. The Alliance contracts with another organization to connect school-to-career efforts and the federal Workforce Investment Act.

Alliance Director Tom Pendleton believes that the state School-to-Work resources provide a base for several years and an opportunity to sharpen his organization's overall focus and direction. He speaks of the need to avoid being "all things to all people" and of finding a way to align his organization's mission and key activities. He is interested in cultivating better partnerships with the business community, rather than investing the bulk of the work in school system efforts. At the same time, he is aware of the time and effort it takes to effect a change in direction and put these partnerships in place.

By contrast, the sunset of the School To Work Opportunities Act led **Catalyst Connection/Pittsburgh Technology Council** (formerly Southwestern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center/Pittsburgh Technology Council) to change its focus from local partnership support to addressing the needs of the business community. When its funding ended in September 2000, the organization was at a crossroads with a "strong need to rethink the purpose and work of the intermediary," says Jeanne Berdik, vice president of workforce education and development for both Catalyst Connection and Pittsburgh Technology Council.

Catalyst Connection/Pittsburgh Technology Council committed six months of bridge funding to support core staff and help with this task. According to Berdik, the organization was already considering the viability of an employer-driven strategy. Staff secured some small grants from local manufacturers and a school system to support a manufacturing pathway initiative. Later, the organization secured Tech Prep and GE Foundation funds, as well as earned income for its services. This

* The High Schools That Work goals, key practices, and key conditions are a framework for whole-school improvement at more than 1,100 high school sites in 26 states. The Southern Regional Education Board works with the states to deliver technical assistance, professional development, publications, and assessment services to the sites. For more information, see www.sreb.org.

year, the school-to-career intermediary budget stands at $800,000. Next year, the projected budget is about $1.5 million.

With the change in direction came the recognition that the primary clients were employers. "We represent employers and can bring them to the table to work on issues and provide services," says Berdik. "The employer community buys in because they recognize the value of a central coordinating function. We focus on industry clusters, a model that works for employers and for school districts. In the manufacturing cluster, for example, we work with local manufacturers to define skill needs and career opportunities and to engage them as the core leadership. Then we bring partners to the table who provide curriculum and instruction, professional development, and the design of youth-based experiences in the community."

Catalyst Connection/Pittsburgh Technology Council covers a 13-county area, with 150 schools districts, ranging from the large Pittsburgh system to very small rural districts. Because the organization wants to have regional impact, it crafts and then replicates industry-based local models. It also disseminates information to the employer community with systemic purposes in mind. For example, CC/PTC publishes studies on key issues for education in developing a quality workforce and disseminates this to employers so business staff can have informed conversations with local and regional partners. The intermediary is creating a report card on the regional status of education, focusing on ten priority education goals and identifying indicators for each. This reporting will eventually capture and summarize building-level data. Berdik says that the organization wants to do more school-by-school advocacy at state and federal levels on issues that emerge from this informational initiative.

For Further Reading

Several publications of the School-to-Work Intermediary Project provide additional information on sustaining the activities of intermediaries. All are available at www.intermediarynetwork.org.

These publications include:

- *The Intermediary Guidebook: Making and Managing Community Connections* (2001)
- *Youth Councils and Comprehensive Youth Planning* (2001)
- *School-to-Work Opportunities for All Youth—Intermediary Organizations and Expanding Options* (2000)
- *State Strategies for Sustaining School-to-Work* (2000)

Conclusion

In the waning days of funding under the School To Work Opportunities Act, intermediaries that link schools, employers, and other community resources have grappled with ways to redirect their efforts. Several members of the Intermediary Network have found new allies and resources and defined more clearly their value-added, competitive advantage and business models. Some have developed business/marketing strategies that are highly valued in their communities. And some have become more focused on activities that emerge from either education or workforce development funding streams, choosing to be less comprehensive in their reach, if not their vision.

This is still a time of transition. The members of the Intermediary Network are committed to continuing their collaboration and to learning from one another—and to continuing the work they love and believe is critical to the future of the youth, employers, and communities they represent.

The intermediaries that responded to this survey provide encouragement that a changing fiscal reality, although difficult, can be a catalyst for positive strategic and operational decisions. Their efforts point the way toward strategies that can enable intermediaries to sustain and even expand their convening, brokering, measuring, and policy-promoting work in a new environment

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The Intermediary Network
www.intermediarynetwork.org

The Intermediary Network is a national association of leading education and workforce development organizations working locally to ensure student success. Network members provide powerful and meaningful links among schools, communities, and workplace partners. Members also serve as the convener of local collaborations of intermediaries in their own communities.

The Network, which began in 1999 as a part of the federally funded School-to-Work Intermediary Project, is currently made up of 35 highly functioning intermediary organizations, each of which performs at least two of the following functions:

- Convene local leadership;
- Broker services;
- Ensure the quality of local efforts;
- Promote policies to sustain successful practices.

Network members perform these functions to help students combine learning with doing and help youth become better prepared for post-secondary learning and careers.

The Network has emerged as a self-governing, self-sustaining organization, committed to carrying on with concentrated efforts to promote intermediary work. Project partners New Ways to Work and Jobs for the Future continue to work with the network as the facilitating partner and research arm respectively. Keep the Change continues as a convening partner and in supporting the Network's policy agenda.

Mission: The Intermediary Network connects highly functioning intermediary organizations to one another to share best practices, provide learning opportunities, and ensure the long-term sustainability of intermediary practice. The Network has established standards of quality practice for intermediaries and their professionals. It is dedicated to serving as an advocate for the work of intermediaries and promotes their sustainability.

The Intermediary Network works to:

- Strengthen and expand the efforts of intermediaries across the country;
- Represent the collective voice of organizations and individuals performing intermediary functions; and
- Promote the importance of intermediary organizations and activities on the public policy agenda.

The 35 current members of the network are actively seeking to recruit others who perform intermediary functions in their communities. Potential members include national organizations, local intermediaries, Youth Councils, chambers of commerce, and local education agencies. The Network is also crafting membership strategies to include options for national affiliates and partners, state School-to-Work directors, and state-level intermediaries. Organizations that have emerged as a result of the transformation and evolution of local School-to-Work Partnerships are particularly encouraged to consider joining the Network.

The School-to-Work Intermediary Project: From 1998 through 2002, the School-to-Work Intermediary Project strengthened and raised the public profile of local, state, regional, and national organizations that connect schools, workplaces, and other community resources.

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